

The Story of Ekadashi

(This article was originally written in 1956 by Sri Navincandra Cakravarti, a disciple of Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati Thakur and in 1979 translated into English by Vyenkata das brahmachari.)

Many devotees are very inquisitive about the appearance of Sri Ekadashi and about her special characteristics. Therefore I am presenting this description from the fourteenth chapter of the Padma Purana, from the section entitled "Kriya-sagara-sara."

Once the great sage Jaimini Rsi said to his spiritual master Srila Vyasadeva, "Oh Gurudeva! Previously, by your mercy, you described to me the history of the glories of the Ganga river, the benefits of worshipping Vishnu, the giving of grains in charity, the giving of water in charity, and the magnanimity of drinking the water that has washed the feet of the brahmanas. O best of the sages, Sri Gurudeva, now, with great enthusiasm, I desire to hear the benefits of fasting on Ekadashi and the appearance of Ekadashi."

*kasmad ekadashi jata tasyah ko va vidhir dvija
kada va kriyate kim va phalam kim va vadasva me
ka va pujyatama tatra devata sad-gunarnava
akurvatah syat ko dosa etan me vaktum arhasi*

"Oh Gurudeva! When did Ekadashi take birth and from whom did she appear? What are the rules of fasting on the Ekadashi? Please describe the benefits of following this vow and when it should be followed. Who is the utmost worshipping presiding deity of Sri Ekadashi? What are the faults in not following Ekadashi properly? Please bestow your mercy upon me and tell about these subjects, as you are the only personality able to do so."

Srila Vyasadeva, upon hearing this enquiry of Jaimini Rsi, became situated in transcendental bliss. "Oh brahmana sage Jaimini! The results of following Ekadashi can only be perfectly described by the Supreme Lord, Narayana, because Sri Narayana is the only personality capable of describing them in full. But I will give a very brief description in answer to your question."

"At the beginning of the material creation, the Supreme Lord created the moving and nonmoving living entities within this world made of five gross material elements. Simultaneously, for the purpose of punishing the human beings, He created a personality whose form was the embodiment of sin (Papapurusha). The different limbs of this personality were constructed of the various sinful activities. His head was made of the sin of murdering a brahmana, his two eyes were the form of the sin of drinking intoxicants, his mouth was made of the sin of stealing gold, his ears were the form of the sin of having illicit connection with the spiritual master's wife, his nose of the sin of killing one's wife, his arms the form of the sin of killing a cow, his neck made of the sin of stealing accumulated wealth, his chest of the sin of abortion, his lower chest of the sin of having sex with another's wife, his stomach of the sin of killing one's relatives, his navel of the sin of killing those who are dependent on him, his waist of the sin of self appraisal, his thighs of the sin of offending the guru, his genital of the sin of selling one's daughter, his buttocks of the sin of telling confidential matters, his feet of the sin of killing one's father, and his hair the form of lesser, less severe sinful activities. In this way, a horrible personality embodying all the sinful activities and vices was created. His bodily colour is black, and his eyes are yellow. He inflicts extreme misery upon sinful persons."

"The Supreme Personality of Godhead, Lord Vishnu, upon seeing this personality of sin, began to think to Himself as follows: 'I am the creator of the miseries and

happiness for the living entities. I am their master because I have created this personality of sin, who gives distress to all dishonest, deceitful, and sinful persons. Now I must create someone who will control this personality.' At this time Sri Bhagavan created the personality known as Yamaraj and the different hellish planetary systems. Those living entities who are very sinful will be sent after death to Yamaraj, who will in turn, according to their sins, send them to a hellish region to suffer.

"After these adjustments had been made, the Supreme Lord, who is the giver of distress and happiness to the living entities, went to the house of Yamaraj, with the help of Garuda, the king of birds. When Yamaraj saw that Lord Vishnu had arrived, he immediately washed His feet and made an offering unto Him. He then had Him sit upon a golden throne. The Supreme Lord, Vishnu, became seated on the throne, whereupon He heard very loud crying sounds coming from the southern direction. He became surprised by this and thus enquired from Yamaraj, 'From where is this loud crying coming?'

"Yamaraj in reply said, 'Oh Deva! The different living entities of the earthly planetary systems have fallen into the hellish regions. They are suffering extremely for their misdeeds. The horrible crying is because of suffering from the inflictions of their past bad karma (actions).'

"After hearing this the Supreme Lord, Vishnu, went to the hellish region to the south. When the inhabitants saw who had come they began to cry even louder. The heart of the Supreme Lord, Vishnu, became filled with compassion. Lord Vishnu thought to Himself, 'I have created all this progeny, and it is because of Me that they are suffering.'"

Srila Vyasadeva continued: "Oh Jaimini, just listen to what the Supreme Lord did next.

*etac canyac ca viprase
vicintya karunamayah
babhuva sahasa tatra
svayam ekadashi tithih*

'After the merciful Supreme Lord thought over what He had previously considered, He suddenly manifested from His own form the deity of the lunar day Ekadashi.' Afterwards the different sinful living entities began to follow the vow of Ekadashi and were then elevated quickly to the abode of Vaikuntha. Oh my child Jaimini, therefore the lunar day of Ekadashi is the selfsame form of the Supreme Lord, Vishnu, and the Supersoul within the heart of the living entities. Sri Ekadashi is the utmost pious activity and is situated as the head among all vows.

"Following the ascension of Sri Ekadashi, that personality who is the form of the sinful activity gradually saw the influence she had. He approached Lord Vishnu with doubts in his heart and began offering many prayers, whereupon Lord Vishnu became very pleased and said, 'I have become very pleased by your nice offerings. What boon is it that you want?'

"The Papapurusha replied, 'I am your created progeny, and it is through me that you wanted distress given to the living entities who are very sinful. But now, by the influence of Sri Ekadashi, I have become all but destroyed. Oh Prabhu! After I die all of Your parts and parcels who have accepted material bodies will become liberated and therefore return to the abode of Vaikuntha. If this liberation of all living entities takes place, then who will carry on Your activities? There will be no one to enact the pastimes in the earthly planetary systems! Oh Keshava! If You want these eternal pastimes to carry on, then You please save me from the fear of

Ekadashi. No type of pious activity can bind me. But Ekadashi only, being Your own manifested form, can impede me. Out of fear of Sri Ekadashi I have fled and taken shelter of men; animals; insects; hills; trees; moving and nonmoving living entities; rivers; oceans; forests; heavenly, earthly, and hellish planetary systems; demigods; and the Gandarvas. I cannot find a place where I can be free from fear of Sri Ekadashi. Oh my Master! I am a product of Your creation, so therefore very mercifully direct me to a place where I can reside fearlessly."

Srila Vyasadeva then said to Jaimini, "After saying this, the embodiment of all sinful activities (Papapurusha) fell down at the feet of the Supreme Lord, Vishnu, who is the destroyer of all miseries and began to cry.

"After this, Lord Vishnu, observing the condition of the Papapurusha with laughter, began to speak thus: 'Oh Papapurusha! Rise up! Don't lament any longer. Just listen, and I'll tell you where you can stay on the auspicious lunar day of Ekadashi. On the day of Ekadashi, which is the benefactor of the three worlds, you can take shelter of foodstuff in the form of grains. There is no reason to worry about this any more, because My form as Sri Ekadashi Devi will no longer impede you.' After giving direction to the Papapurusha, the Supreme Lord, Vishnu, disappeared and the Papapurusha returned to the performance of his own activities.

"Therefore those persons who are serious about the ultimate benefit for the soul will never eat grains on the Ekadashi tithi. According to the instructions of Lord Vishnu, every kind of sinful activity that can be found in the material world takes its residence in this place of foodstuff (grain). Whoever follows Ekadashi is freed from all sins and never enters into hellish regions. If one doesn't follow Ekadashi because of illusion, he is still considered the utmost sinner. For every mouthful of grain that is eaten by a resident of the earthly region, one receives the effect of killing millions of brahmanas. It is definitely necessary that one give up eating grains on Ekadashi. I very strongly say again and again, 'On Ekadashi, don't eat grains, don't eat grains, don't eat grains!' Whether one be a ksatriya, vaisya, shudra, or of any family, he should follow the lunar day of Ekadashi. From this the perfection of varna and ashram will be attained. Especially since even if one by trickery follows Ekadashi, all of his sin become destroyed and he very easily attains the supreme goal, the abode of Vaikuntha."